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Designing an Opera: A Wedding

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DESIGNING AN OPERA: A WEDDING

A SCENIC DESIGN

By

Victoria Halverson

A THESIS

Presented to the Faculty of

The Graduate College of the University of Nebraska

In Partial Fulfillment of Requirements

For the Degree of Master of Fine Arts

Major: Theatre Arts

Under the Supervision of Professor Laurel Shoemaker

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April, 2015

DESIGNING AN OPERA: A WEDDING

A SCENIC DESIGN

Victoria Halverson, M.F.A

University of Nebraska, 2015

Advisor: Laurel Shoemaker

This thesis' purpose is to provide research, photographs and other materials that document the scenic design process of the Glenn Korff School of Music's opera production titled *A Wedding*. Included in this thesis are the following: research images used to convey ideas about location, time period, mood, scale, and textures to the director; visual tools used to communicate the scenic design: early sketches, renderings, and photos of the ¼" scale white and color models; a complete set of drafting plates and painter elevations used to communicate the look of each scenic element to the technical director and paint charge; a props list that details each item used in the production; props research images, giving visuals for the props list; and any additional renderings and paperwork generated during the rehearsal process. Production photographs are included as documentation of the completed design.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to acknowledge the amazing group of people who have spent countless hours bringing this production to fruition. Given the massive undertaking that is *A Wedding*, this team came together to create a beautiful piece of theatre.

Creative Team:

William Shomos, Director

Robert Klein, Stage Manager

Christine Cottom, Costume Coordinator

Travis Tripplett, Lighting Design

Joe Shea, Sound Design

Production Staff:

Jason Hibbard, Technical Director and his entire crew

Jill Hibbard, Props Master and Scenic Artist

Thank you Michaela Stein and David Tousley, my fellow scenic graduate students, for supporting me during our three years at the University of Nebraska Lincoln.

I would also like to acknowledge and thank the following two people for the many hours they have spent advising, teaching, encouraging, and inspiring me. The knowledge they have passed on and the passion for the art of scenic design they have inspired in me is priceless.

JD Madsen

Laurel Shoemaker

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	iii
COPYRIGHT	iv
TABLE OF CONTENTS	v
CHAPTER 1: PRE-PRODUCTION PROCESS	1
1.1: CONCEPTUALIZATION OF DESIGN	1
1.2: RESEARCH IMAGES – ORIGINAL CONCEPT	6
1.3: KEY RESEARCH IMAGES – LOCATION	17
1.4: KEY RESEARCH IMAGES – STAIRCASES	22
1.5: EARLY RENDERING AND SKETCHES	25
1.6: PHOTOGRAPH OF ¼” SCALE WHITE MODEL	30
CHAPTER 2: PRODUCTION PROCESS	31
2.1: PHOTOGRAPH OF 1/4:” SCALE COLOR MODEL	31
2.2: DIGITAL RENDERINGS OF 5 MAIN SCENIC LOOKS	33
2.3: DRAFTING PLATES	36
2.4: PAINTER ELEVATIONS	46
CHAPTER 3: PRODUCTION PROPERTIES	51
3.1: PROPERTIES LIST	51
3.2: PROPERTIES REFERANCE IMAGE BOOK	55

	vi
CHAPTER 4: REHEARSAL PROCESS	73
4.1: PRODUCTION MEETINGS	73
4.2: TECHNICAL REHEARSALS	77
4.3: PROCESS PHOTOGRAPHS OF TECHNICAL REHEARSALS	83
CHAPTER 5: PERFORMANCE	90
5.1 PRODUCTION PHOTOGRAPHS	90
CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION	95
BIBLIOGRAPHY	96

CHAPTER 1: PRE-PRODUCTION PROCESS

1.1: CONCEPTUALIZATION OF DESIGN

Opera, a word with immediate associations of grandeur, opulence, gaudiness, pageantry, and no doubt many others. I had never worked on a project of operatic size before, nor had I worked on a project where all the text is sung and the entire production is underscored. Having designed musicals, I understood that the flow and pace of the music would be incorporated into the scenic design—but I had never worked on a production where the music was essentially a full character. Having designed theatrical plays, I understood that the text and its subtext would help director Shomos and me to conceptualize the world of *A Wedding* by the Pulitzer Prize-winning composer Bolcom (1938-). Not having worked on an opera, my first task as the scenic designer was figuring out how to break down the script.

Breaking down the script, for a scenic designer, is breaking down the dialogue and situations of the script to get to the core idea. A designer identifies the different locations suggested by the stage directions by the script. Never having worked on a piece where all the dialogue was sung, I had to find the best way to break down the score of *A Wedding*. It took me a substantial amount of reading and then listening to the score on multiple occasions to understand fully the dialogue and situations that take place throughout the opera. Once I had an understanding of the actual text of the opera, I then listened through a recording of the opera again and started making notations about scenic locations and needs of those locations. A fourth “listen-through” allowed me to make more notations about scenic changes and how they flowed with the music. In total I went through the score, in detail, four times during the very early days of the design process.

At first I read through the script – no soundtrack playing along to hear the music and how the words sounded when sung. The reason for this approach was my belief that I would be able

to grasp the opera's ideas without the music, approaching the score as I would a script of a play. That was incorrect thinking. I was reading a score, and the musical notes on the page pulled my focus from the dramatic action. I am able to read music so as I was trying to "read" the score, my mind was trying to play out the music—compromising my ability to comprehend the actual dramatic compromised. The first time I read a script, I did so to get a general understanding of the plot and character. I make no notes about scenic locations nor did I need to at the time. This first read-through enabled me to grasp enough of the plot and some situations I could generally understand of *A Wedding*. But I knew I needed the music to be able to understand this opera completely. The music and vocal told the emotional story of the characters that could not be interpreted through reading.

Soon after I finished my first "read" of the score, I listened through a recording of the score. Director William Shomos provided me access to a recorded performance of composer William Bolcom's opera. Since I had a general understanding of the opera, I decided to start taking notes about the characters, situations, and plot as I listened. This required me to pause and restart the recording as I went through the score so I could write down thoughts and questions. At no time did I take notes on scenic elements and needs during this process. I was still figuring out the characters and situations to get to the central plot statement—what I believe the central plot statement —is of *A Wedding*.

I used these thoughts and questions to help me prepare for the first meeting with director Shomos. At this meeting I asked some scenic questions—pertaining to what was originally written in the score—but nothing specific. This first conversation focused on the story and situations of the opera. We discussed exactly how wealthy were the two families on which the opera focuses (the Brenners and the Sloans). Two major themes we discussed were perfection and flaws; how those themes relate to the wedding and the two families, and how they contradict each other. The

families are each wealthy enough to buy perfection, but each are flawed. The Sloan family, for example, has one daughter addicted to morphine and another daughter who is in an interracial relationship. There is a prejudice that extends even to Italians, despite the presence of an Italian son-in-law.

Within the framework of this discussion about perfection and flaws, we discussed the time period in which we wanted to set *A Wedding*. Composer Bolcom based *A Wedding* on the 1978 Robert Altman movie of the same title. Originally the opera was written to be set in 1978, and so director Shomos and I discussed this option as well as possibly giving the opera a more contemporary setting. We discussed the positives and negatives of setting the opera in each. We resolved nothing with regard to time period at this meeting, but we did establish a major point in the possibility of trivializing the situations of the Sloan family if we chose a modern day setting.

The final question the director and I asked the other at this first meeting was “Whose wedding is it?” After reading though the score, it was clear that this wedding isn’t about the newly married couple. We agreed that the opera was about the two families. As the opera is titled *A Wedding*, I thought to ask “Whose?” We agreed to both dig into the score more to find an overarching theme and to ruminate on “Whose wedding is it?” The word “wedding” has one definition of being an instance or act of joining in a close association. Similarly, “wedded” has one definition as to place in an intimate association. Neither of these definitions pertain to the union of husband and wife. The answer could then be theorized as a working relationship between two characters, instead of a romantic relationship.

After the first meeting with the director, I starting my second listen through of the opera. I started taking notes on scenic and prop needs, but what I mostly paid attention to was the dialogue. I underlined what I felt were important, poignant, enlightening lines of dialogue and made notes on character emotions and musical feeling. Being able to hear how an actress or actor

sang the words helped immensely. It was at this listen-through that I realized I needed to look at the music as a character itself, and not as an unknown entity. The music itself held clues to the overall emotion of the opera and helped me in figuring out the theme.

After director Shomos and I went back through the score we had our next meeting. We decided that setting *A Wedding* in 1970 would make the show have more meaning, making the situations within the show have more impact. The overarching theme was discussed as well. Solidified at this meeting was the idea of flawed perfection. Each family presents the idea of a “perfect” family, but revealed beneath the surface of each family are “imperfections,” or flaws, hidden from society. Flawed perfection became the overarching theme for *A Wedding*; it was to be a perfect presentation but every element has flaws; it was to be a perfect exterior with an imperfect interior.

Director Shomos and I started to discuss the scenery more in depth during this meeting. The overall set was to be a unit set—one main setting seen throughout the entire opera that has small changes to suggest new locations. A unit set was to make changing locations smoother and allow them to happen within the music allotted. We discussed the grandeur of the Sloan estate, in which the entire opera takes place, and how ornate our representation of that grandeur. We decided that the house should fill the given stage space and be located on the stage in a way that would force the actors to be as close to the audience as possible. I believed a large house which filled the large proscenium opening would help communicate the grandeur and wealth of the Sloan family. Director Shomos and I wanted the audience to create a connection to the families, and to do that the audience needed to not feel separated from the action of the opera.

During a meeting with J.D Madsen, my advisor, I realized that while I knew and understood the material, I had no clear concept statement. While we had decided on a theme, director Shomos and I had not agreed upon a clear statement on what we felt was the core of the

opera. Such a statement was a necessary hook on which I relate all my scenic design choices to during the rest of the process. After I had discussed the plot and situation of the opera with J.D Madsen, we discussed how to find a concept statement. I always have a notebook with me during meetings and I started writing down statements that caught my attention during this conversation.

The two statements or concepts which remained in my mind long after the meeting were:

“Control is an illusion” and “Force of personality.”

“Control is an illusion” became the concept statement for *A Wedding*. I proposed this concept to director Shomos and he agreed that this was the concept toward which we were working. During the time I took to ruminate on what the concept statement could be, I realized that “Control is an illusion” worked in conjunction with the theme of flawed perfection. I voiced this realization to director Shomos at our meeting, and he agreed. What is perfection but having the ultimate control? With a theme and concept realized for the design, my next step was research.

CHAPTER 1: PRE-PRODUCTION PROCESS

1.2: RESEARCH IMAGES – ORIGINAL CONCEPT

For the original concept I researched three main things: glass artwork, illusion artwork, and transparent and translucent walls. Part of my original design concept was, to help sustain the “illusion” aspect. I thus concluded that we needed to have part of the upper level walls translucent or transparent. This “see-through effect” would bolster the feeling that the house itself was an illusion, and hopefully make the audience question if the families were real. For the desired translucent/transparent wall material, I mainly focused on clear glass with colored glass within. This combination represented the flawed perfection theme, with the perfect clear glass shaped with a “flawed” color interior. I researched illusion artwork, which included furniture, again to capture the “illusion” aspect. These included acrylic furniture, which looks like something recognizable while being completely transparent. Transparent and translucent walls were researched while I still was thinking of using transparent or translucent walls in the design. I wanted to how the look of those styles of walls were represented in reality.

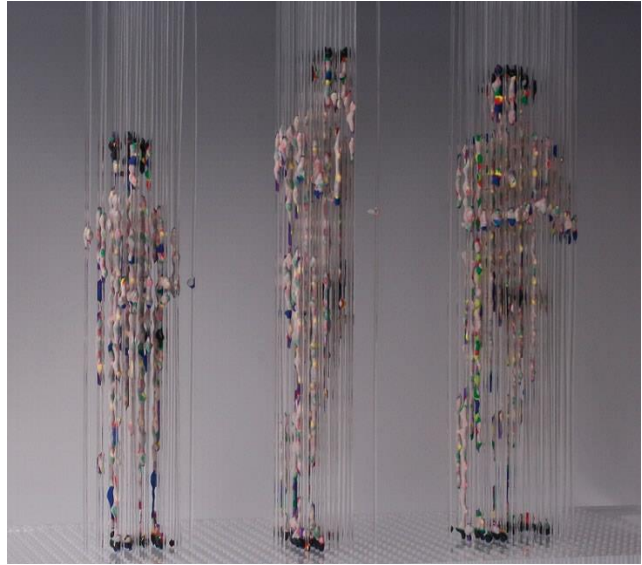
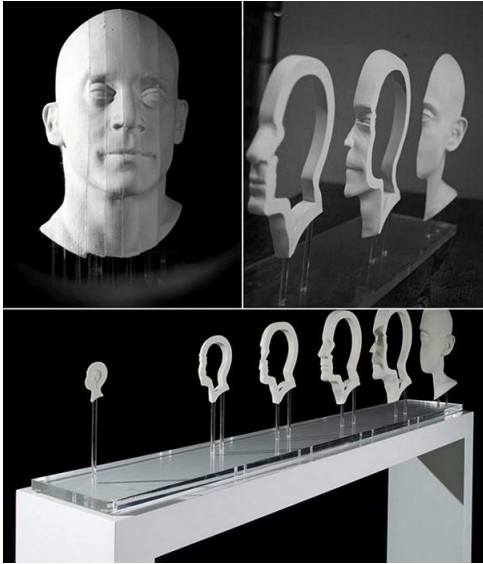






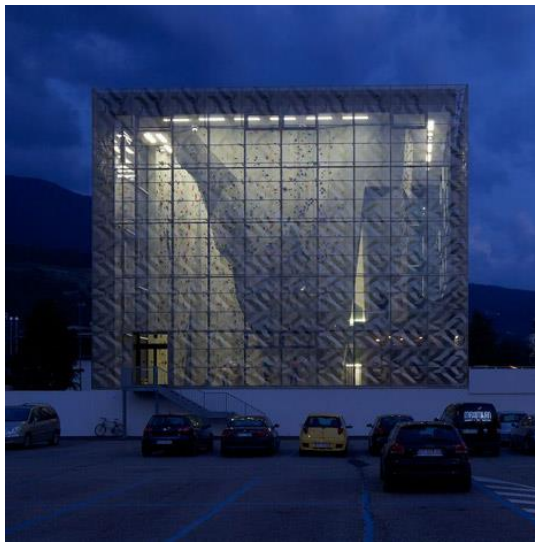
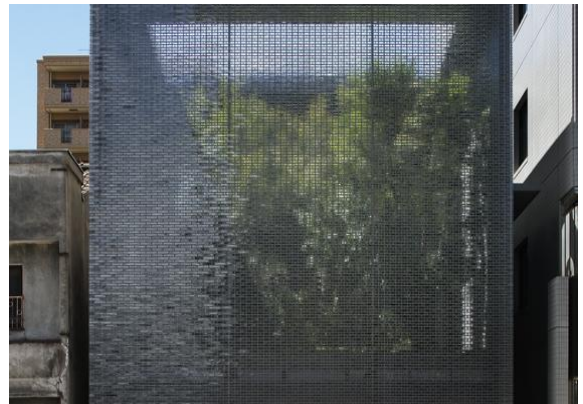




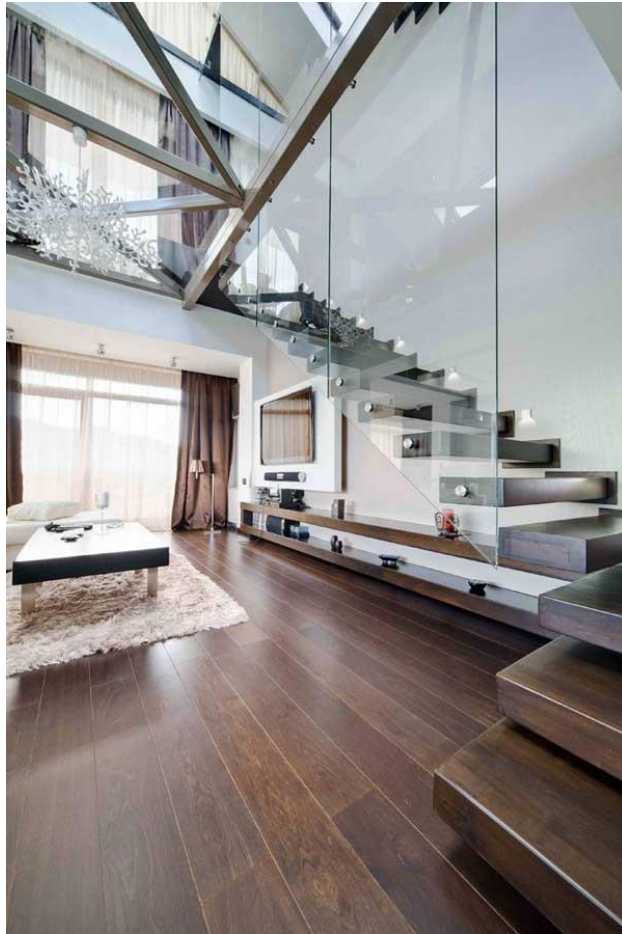










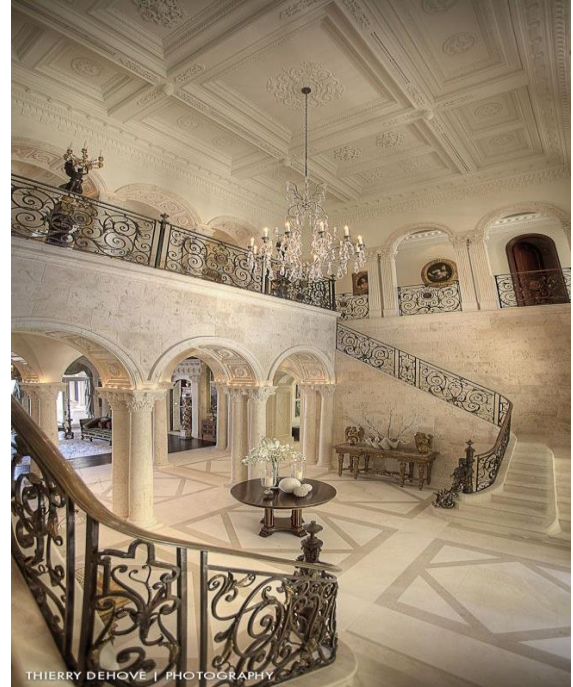
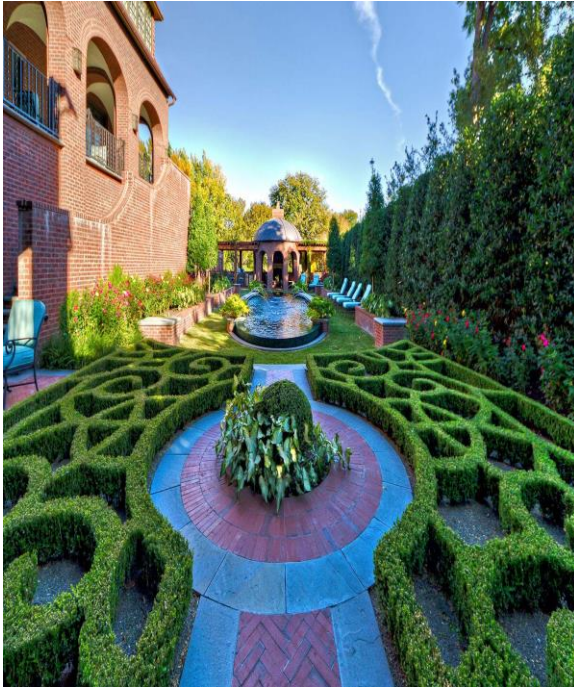


CHAPTER 1: PRE-PRODUCTION PROCESS

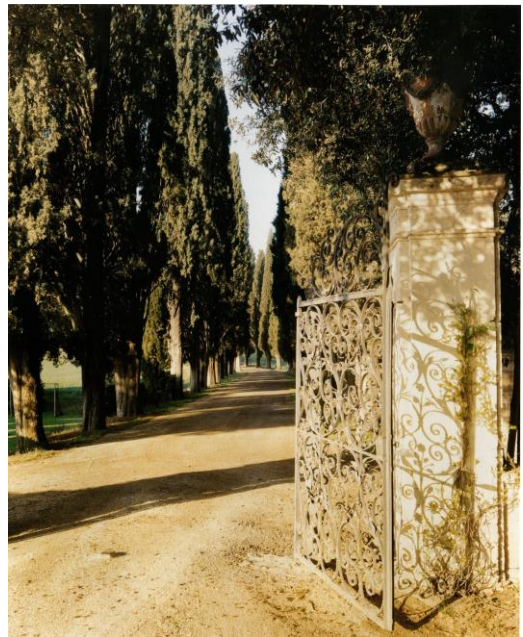
1.3: KEY RESEARCH IMAGES – LOCATION

As I stated in Chapter 1.1, at one of our first meetings director Shomos and I decided that the Sloans were a very wealthy family. I cast a wide net for the estate research, looking for different styles and ages of the estates. The Sloan family is what director Shomos and I classified as “old money.” This information made me look for estates that had an older feel, as if the estates had been built many years ago with inherited money. While the opera takes place on the Sloan estate, Italy recurs frequently and a location that appears throughout the opera is a “grotto” that should evoke the feeling of Italy.











CHAPTER 1: PRE-PRODUCTION PROCESS

1.4: KEY RESEARCH IMAGES – STAIRCASES

Many estate dwellings grand staircases, either in the entryway or in a main room. There are many different styles of these grand staircases, and I looked at many during my research. In earlier conversations and meetings with director Shomos, the two main staircases in my design were becoming a major scenic transition element. I then decided to research estate staircases specifically. I wanted to see different railing styles, tread styles of the stairs, how each staircase flowed with the rest of the house architecture, in an effort to design staircases that evoked the grandeur in which the Sloane family lived.



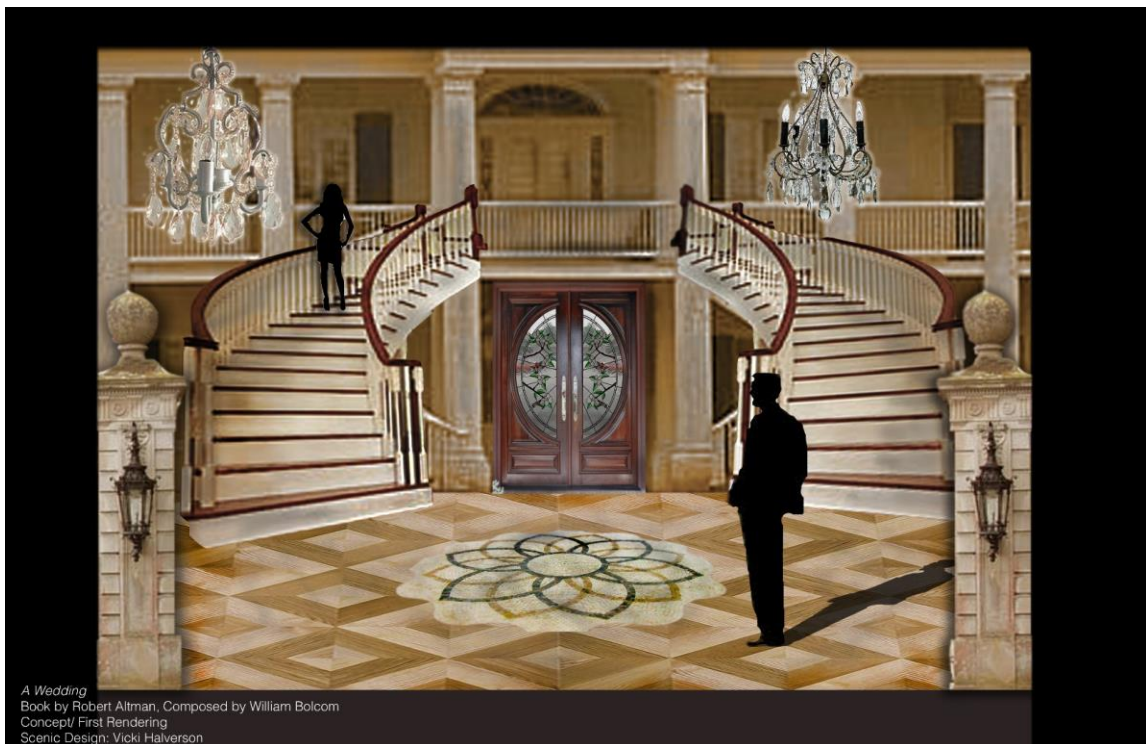




CHAPTER 1: PRE-PRODUCTION PROCESS

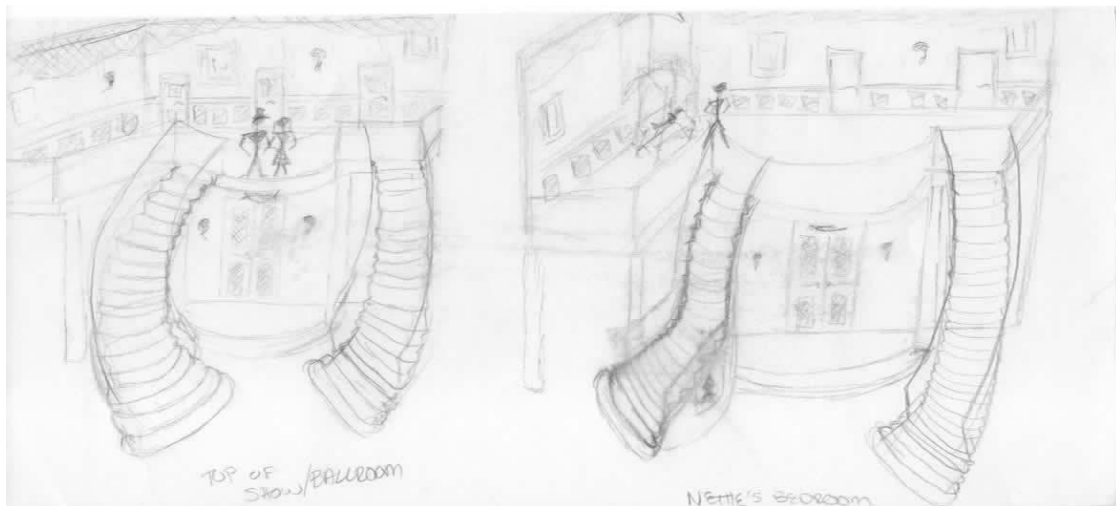
1.5: EARLY RENDERING AND SKETCHES

Once I had accumulated enough research, I wanted to have something visual to show director Shomos. Below is the concept rendering I created in Photoshop. This image consisted of several images pulled from the internet and then manipulated in Photoshop. I wanted visually to show what we had discussed in previous meetings about the scenic design. Up until I created this rendering, we had discussed two main staircases leading to a second level that has doors to other rooms in the estate. On the main floor there were main doors to the estate's living quarters and at the front of the stage were two gateposts. We had also discussed two hanging chandeliers with undergraduate Travis Tripplett, the lighting designer. Once I got the approval from director Shomos on the concept rendering, I could move onto fleshing out the actual layout and design of the Sloan Estate.



Before starting to work in Vectorworks, the 2D and 3D drafting program I used to draw the scenic elements, I quickly sketched out what the early scenic design was going to be.

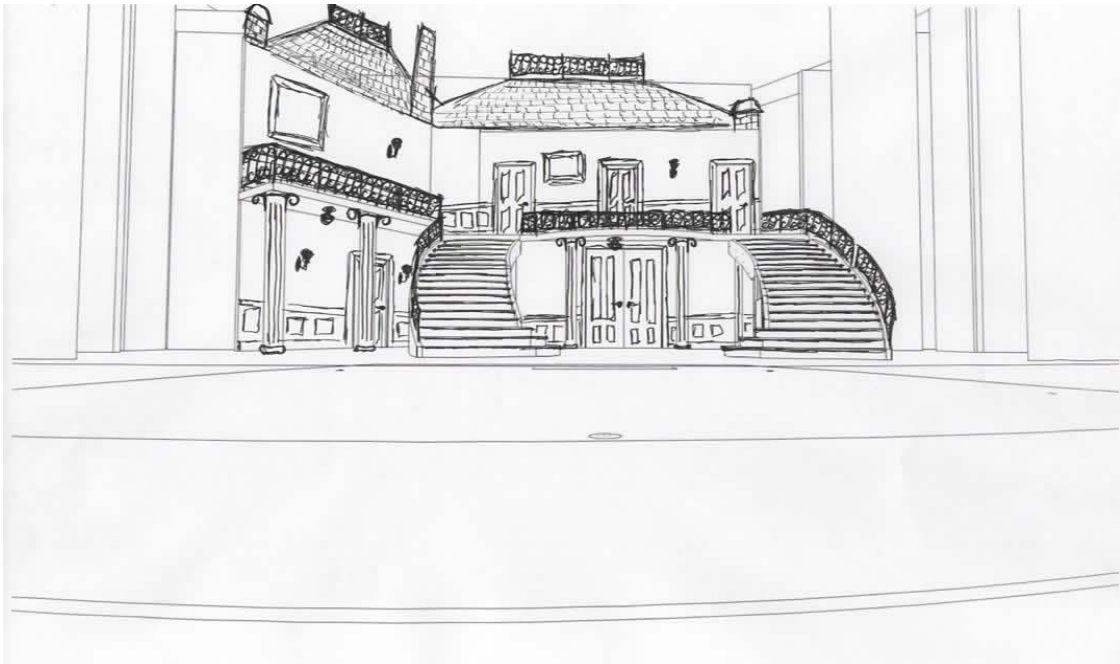
Sketching aids me later when I begin to work in Vectorworks. In this case, sketching first helped me to solidify the layout look of the main estates, and it helped me to figure out what changed for each location from that base look. At the time of these sketches I was still planning to have the top of the upper level walls be translucent.



When I started working in Vectorworks, I went to working in 3D immediately. This way I could quickly see how my set appear look *en toto*. There came a point in this process where actually drawing something once more helped me solidify my design. Below is a camera view of the early set design for the main estate look. There are no details yet, just walls with indications where the door will go, column indicators, and the staircases. By this point, the scenic design had moved to a more realistic feel, but when any door opened there was nothing behind it. Instead of seeing more house, as a spectator might assume, the audience members would instead see straight to the cyclorama. The only risk to his approach was the possible conclusion among audiences that I had forgotten something in the scenic design.



I printed about 10 copies of this image onto 8.5" x 11" paper on which sketch. Instead of using pencil, as in my earlier sketches, I used a fine-tip black pen. This practice made me force myself simply to draw and not to worry about correcting. If I needed to start again, I had a fresh image waiting. During this sketching session, I figured out the top of the walls, practical lighting locations, early column details, railing details and wall decorations. Below is the sketch that inspired the final scenic design.



Below is the final Vectorworks 3D white model based on the above sketch. There were a few modifications due to height constrictions of the theatre.



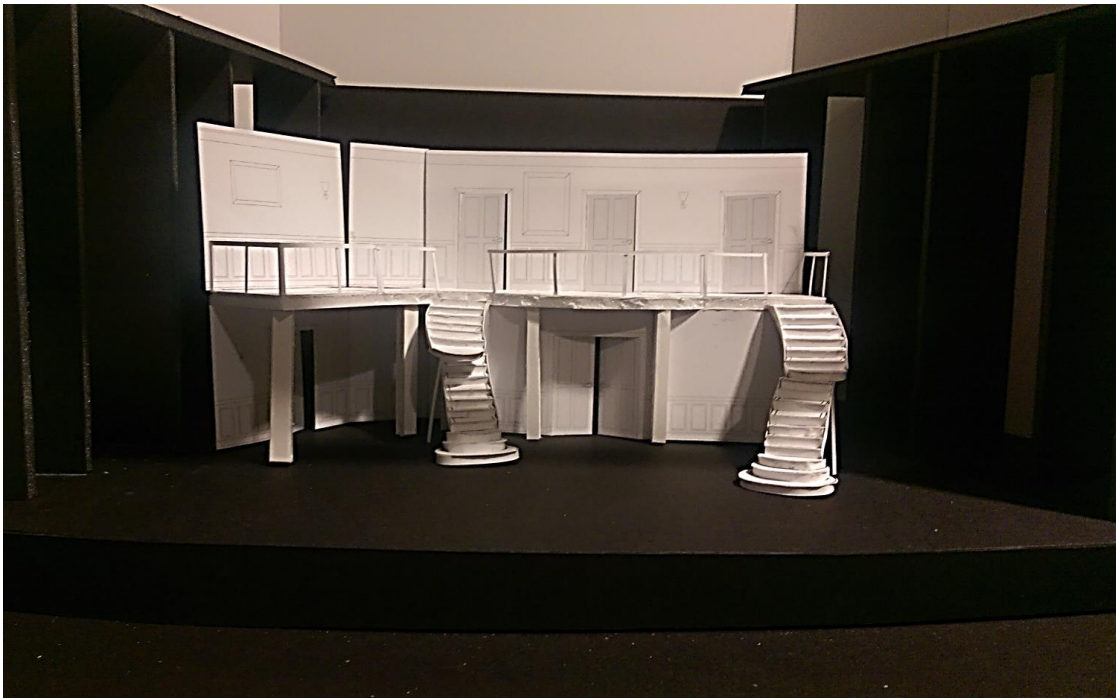
Below is the final Vectorworks 3D model. Again, a few modifications were necessary since I created the above white 3D model. I simplified the staircases for budgetary and stage space reasons, added more wall trim, and adjoined a reveal/masking wall.



CHAPTER 1: PRE-PRODUCTION PROCESS

1.6: PHOTOGRAPH OF 1/4" SCALE WHITE MODEL

While sketches and doing the early Vectorworks 3D white models, I created a quick white bash model out of white foam core and cardstock to show director Shomos and technical director Jason Hibbard. All doors opened, a lower portion of a staircase moved (as director Shomos and I had discussed in previous meetings). Finally, there was a practical turntable in the second level left corner. The white model allowed the three of us to talk through all location changes and have a 1/4" scale representation to see those changes.



CHAPTER 2: PRODUCTION PROCESS

2.1: PHOTOGRAPH OF 1/4" SCALE COLOR MODEL





CHAPTER 2: PRODUCTION PROCESS

2.2: DIGITAL RENDERINGS OF 5 MAIN SCENIC LOOKS

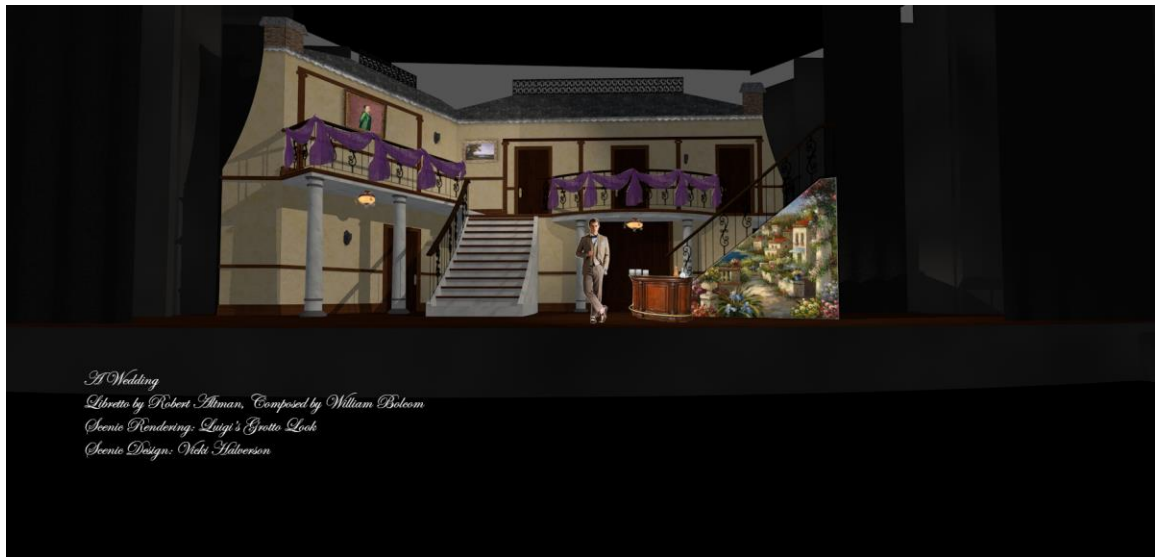
The base of all these looks was the Vectorworks 3D model seen in Chapter 1.5 and finished using Photoshop.



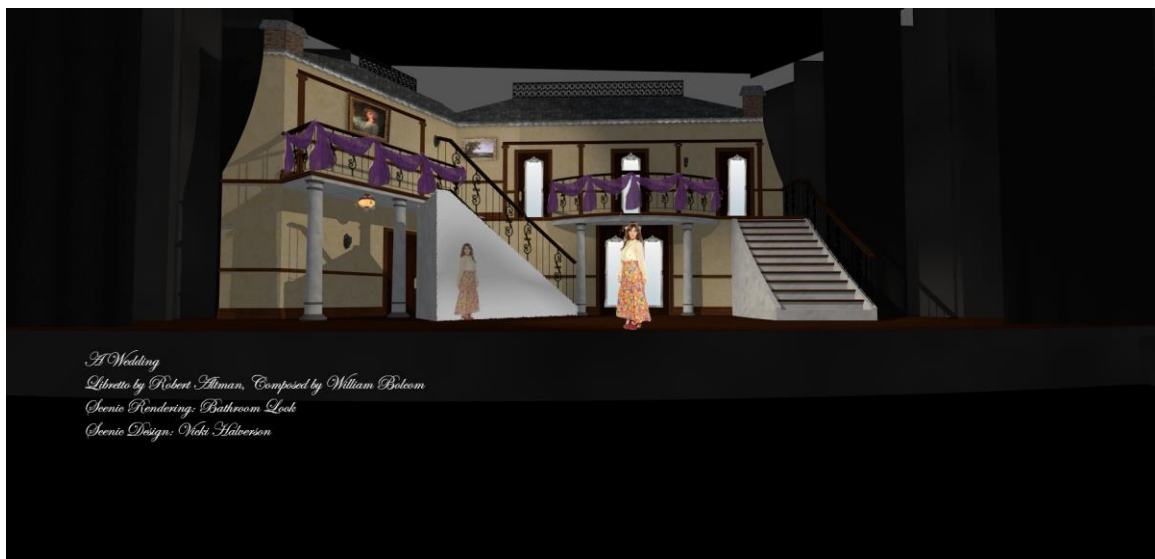
Nettie's Bedroom Look



Sloan Estate Interior Look



Luigi's Grotto Look



Bathroom Look

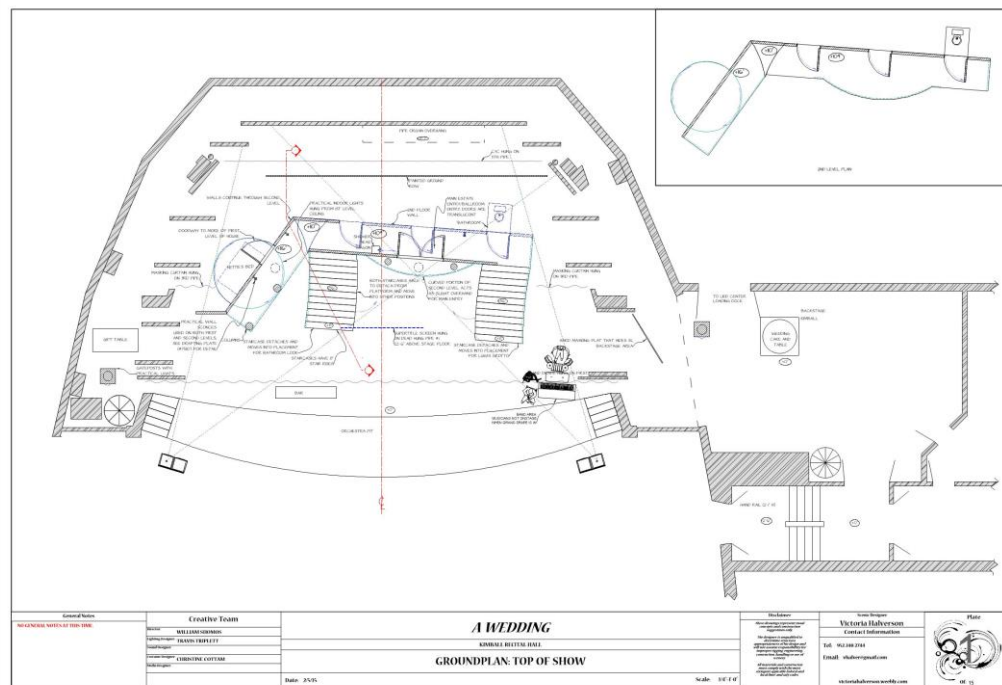


Sloan Estate Exterior Look

CHAPTER 2: PRODUCTION PROCESS

2.3: DRAFTING PLATES

Below is the final drafting packet submitted to the technical director. The first plate (page), which is a $\frac{1}{4}"=1'-0"$ scale groundplan, functioned as a template to create the 3D model seen at the end of Chapter 1.5. Plate 1 is also the first look of the opera.



Plates 2 and 3 are 1/8"=1'0" transition groundplans showing how the scenery changes from look to look.

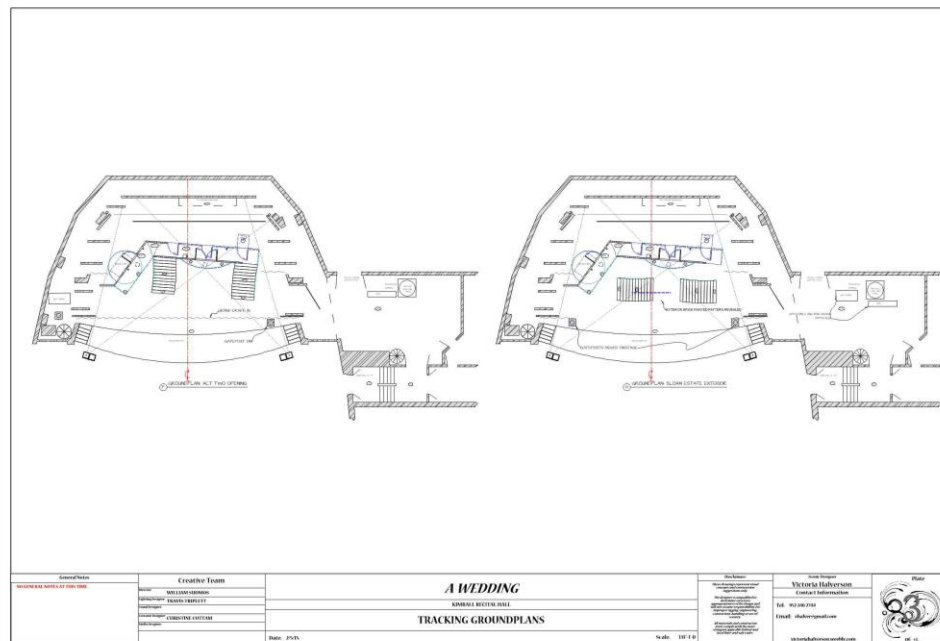
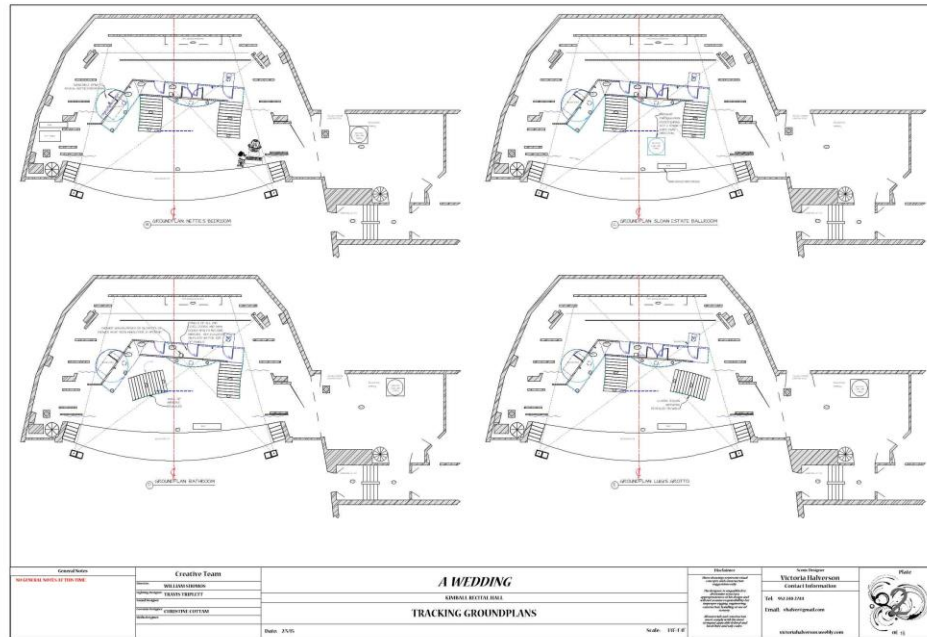


Plate 4 is the $\frac{1}{4}"=1'-0"$ scale section. The cut line for this is notated on plate 1. To create the level of detail seen, I used the Vectorworks 3D model (seen in Chapter 1.5). By using a tool in the program that actually cuts through a drafted object, I was able to cut through the 3D drafted set. With the drafting done in 3D, I could then view the cut set from the side that matches the theatre. I then noted where the set is cut through with a different fill.

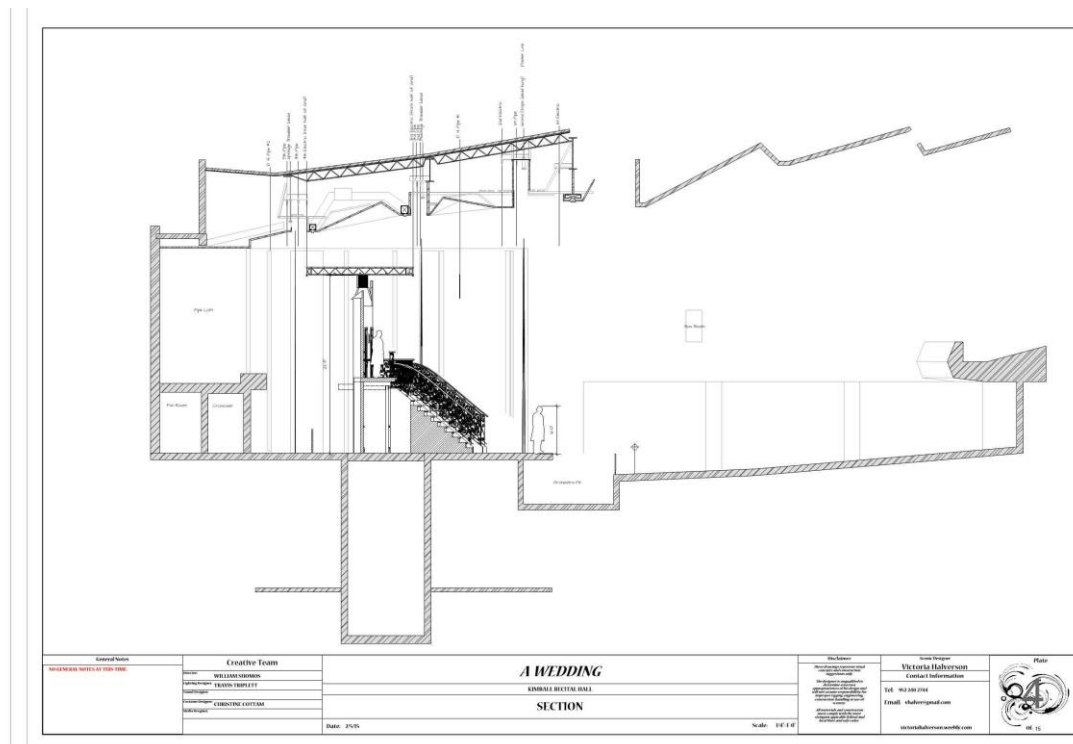
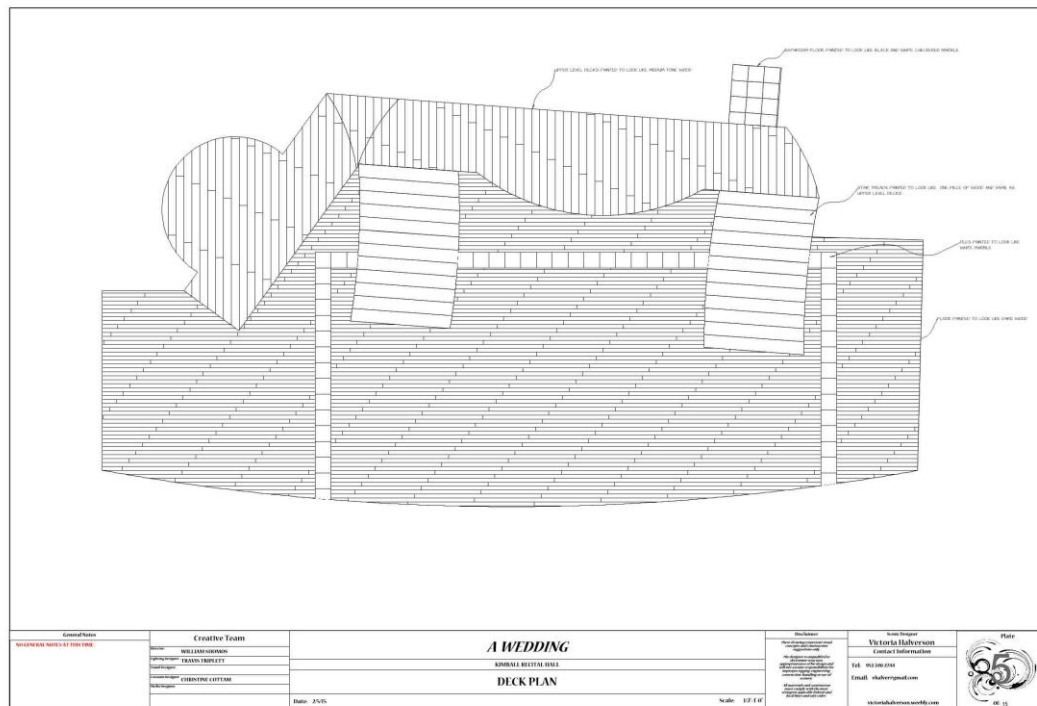
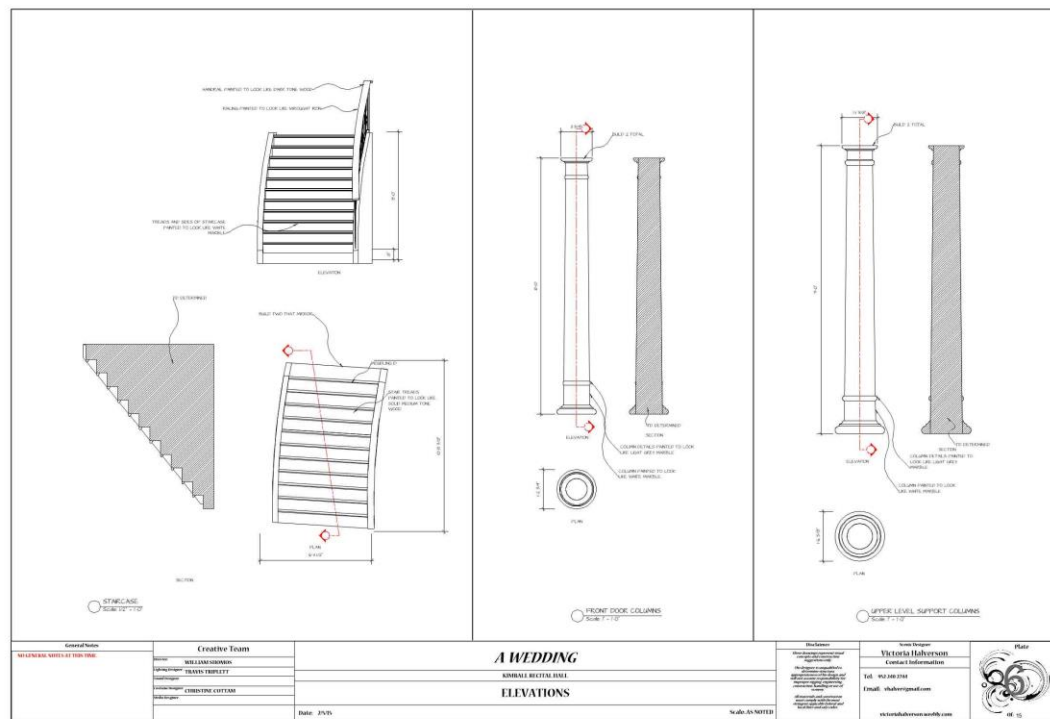
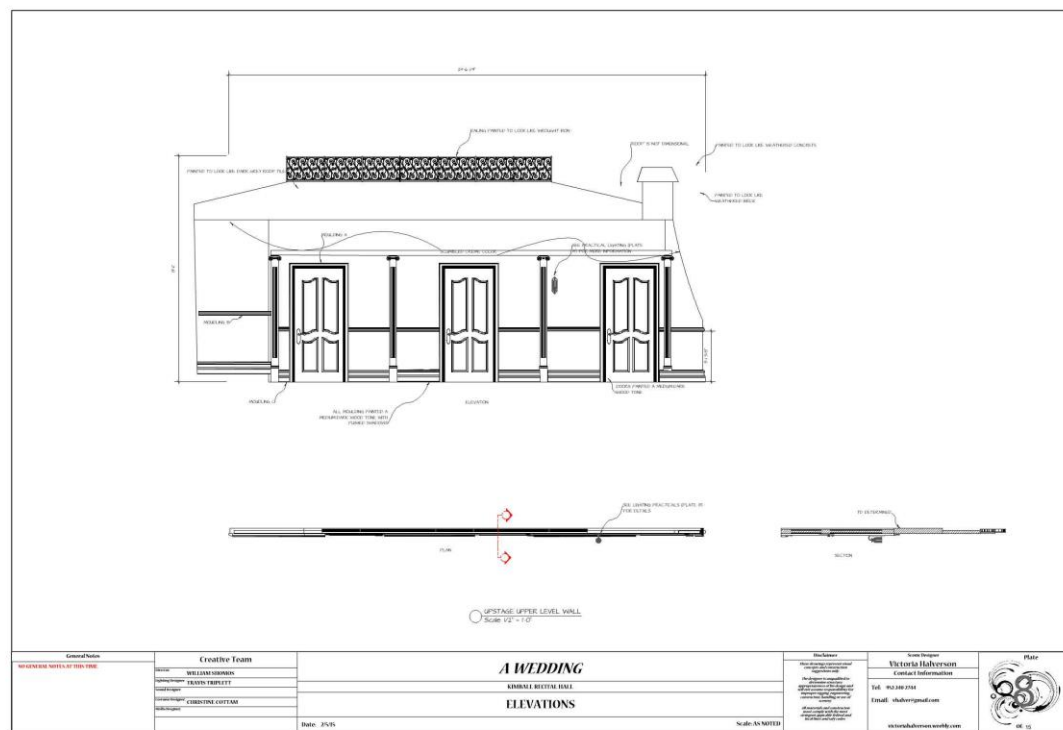
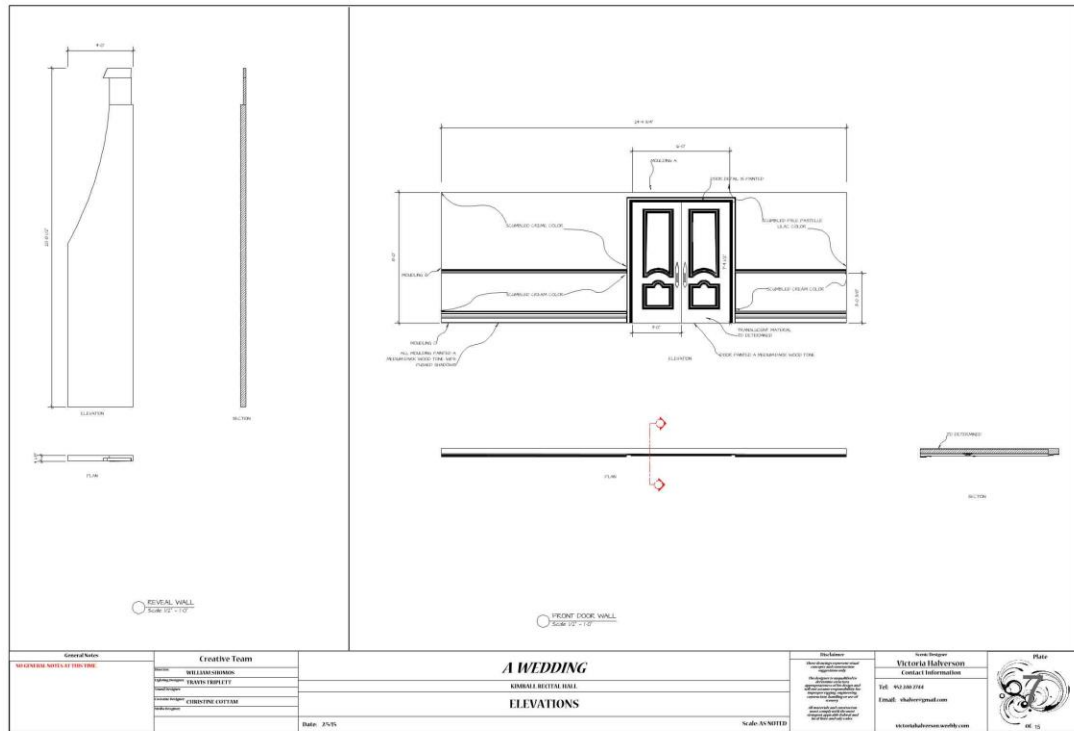


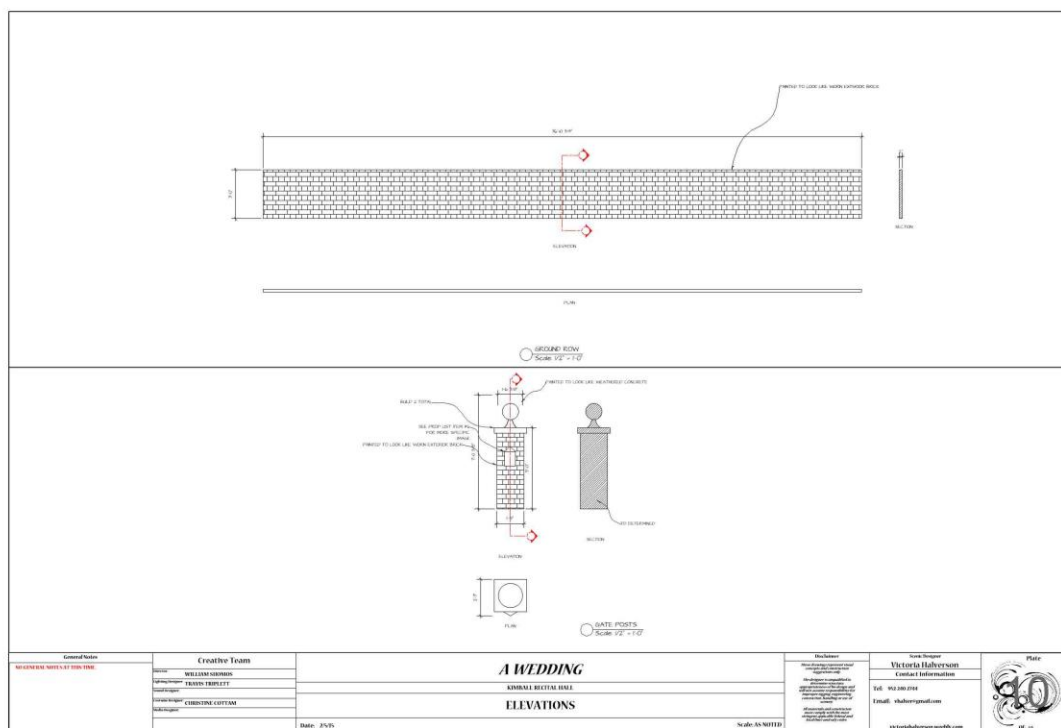
Plate 5 is a 1/2"=1'-0" deck plan. This plate shows the different floor texture patterns without walls noted.

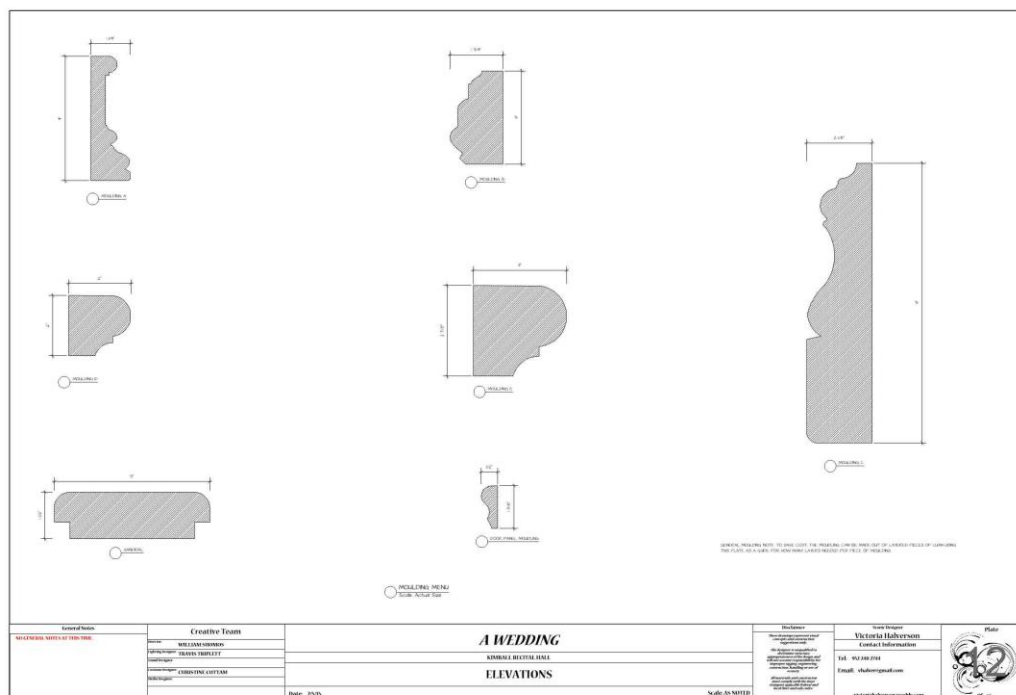


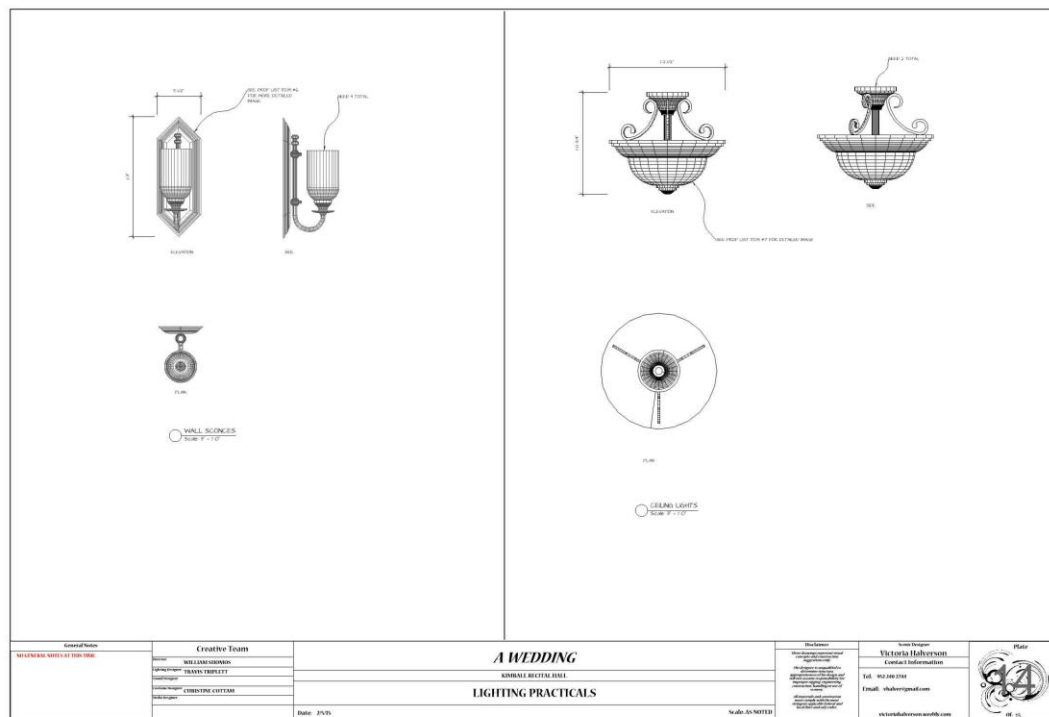
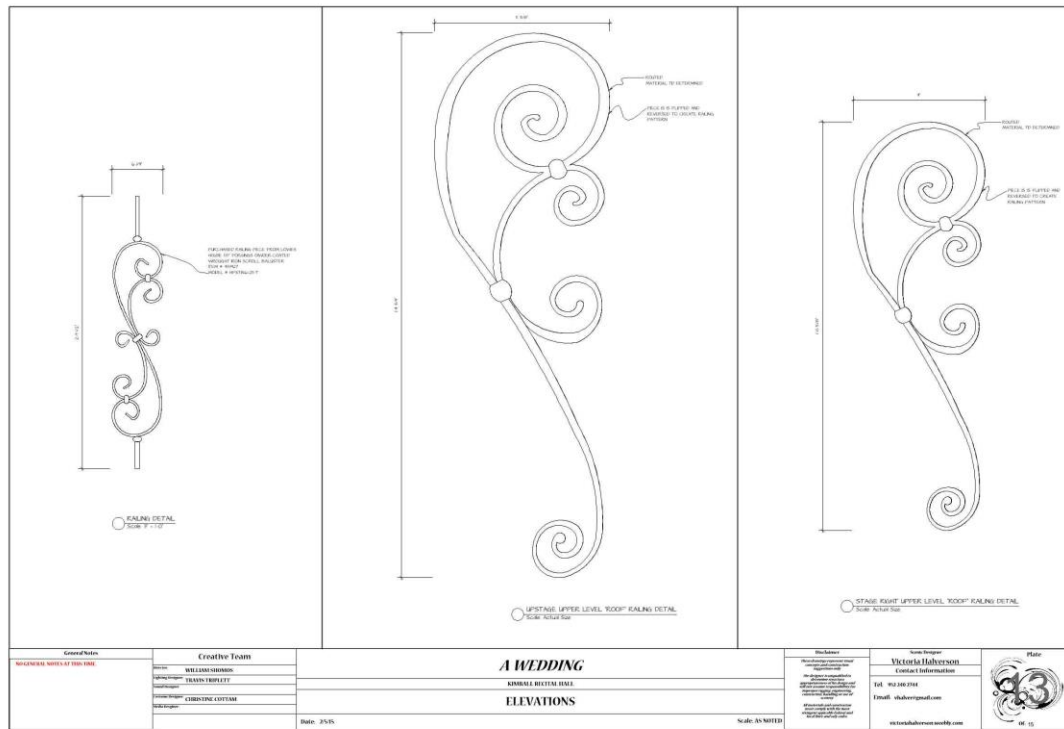
Plates 6-15 are all elevations of the different scenic units needed. Each has a plan view (as if seen from a bird's eye view), elevation view (as if looking at the piece straight at eye level) and a section view (showing details as if it were cut through). All of these were created using the 3D model (seen in Chapter 1.5) pieces. The same principles applied to these as to the section on plate two, described on page 37.

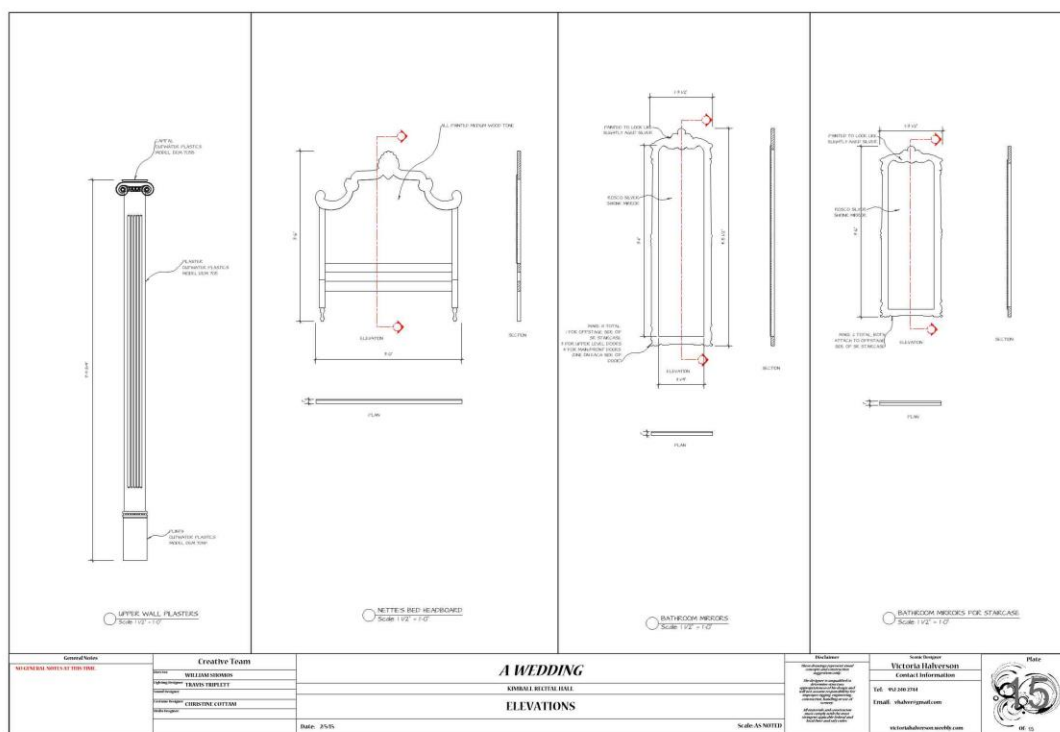








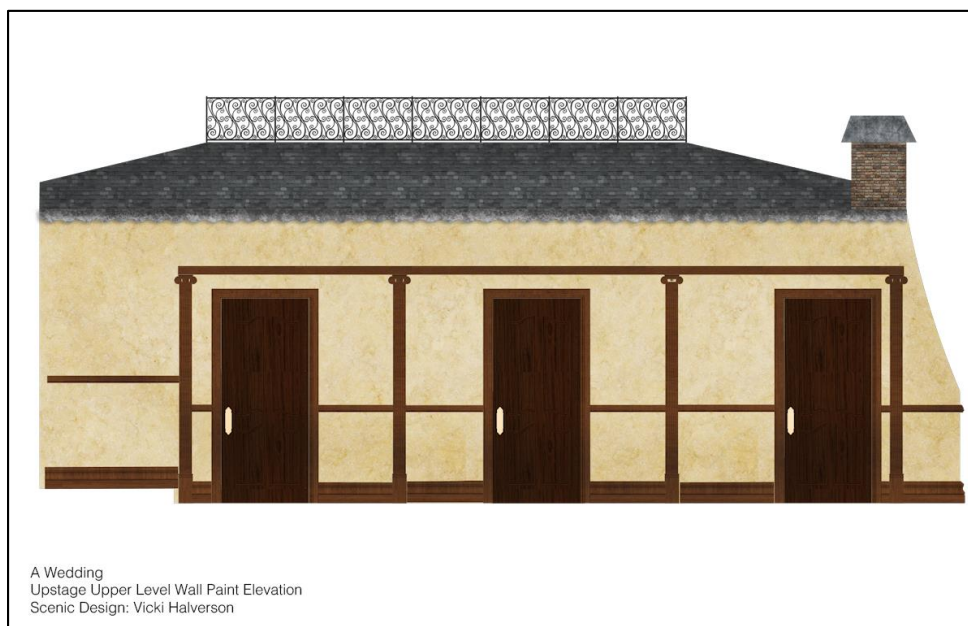


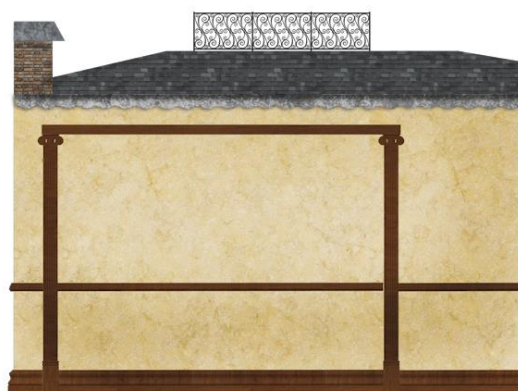


CHAPTER 2: PRODUCTION PROCESS

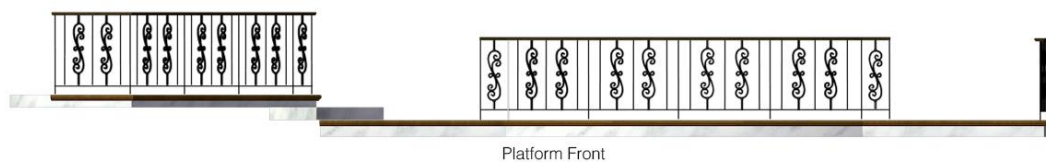
2.4: PAINTER ELEVATIONS

All of the painter elevations were created using the pieces of the Vectorworks 3D model and finished in Photoshop.





A Wedding
SR Upper Level Wall Paint Elevation
Scenic Design: Vicki Halverson



Groundcover

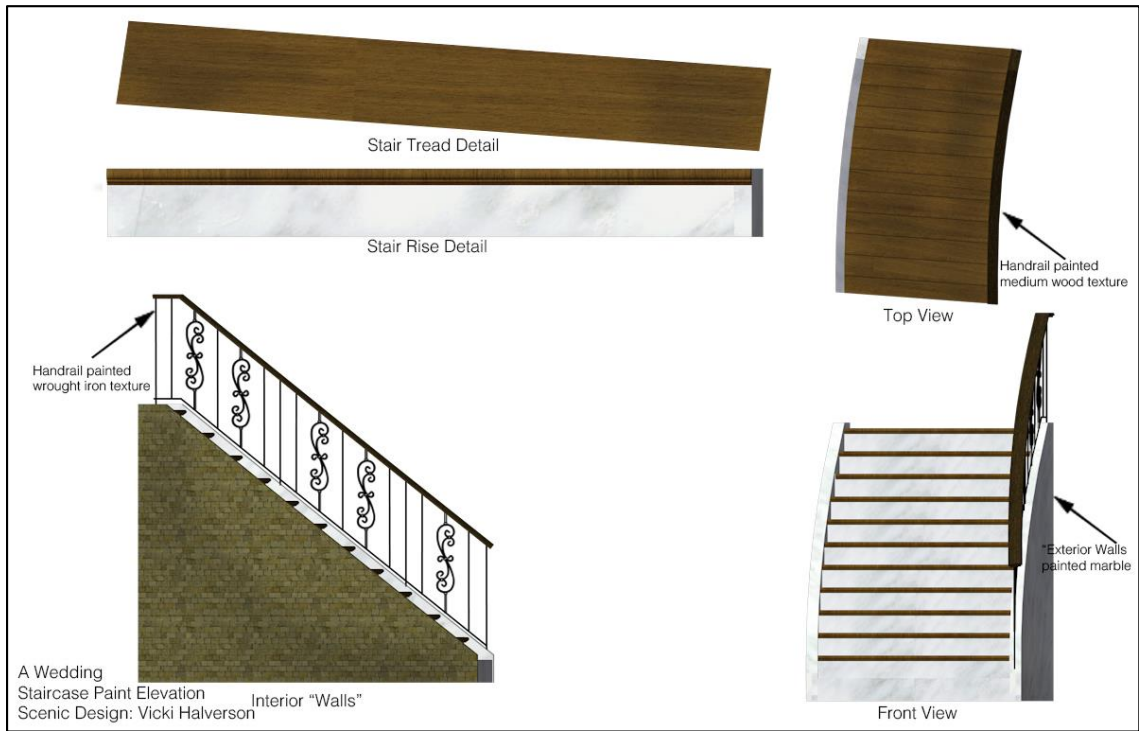


Columns

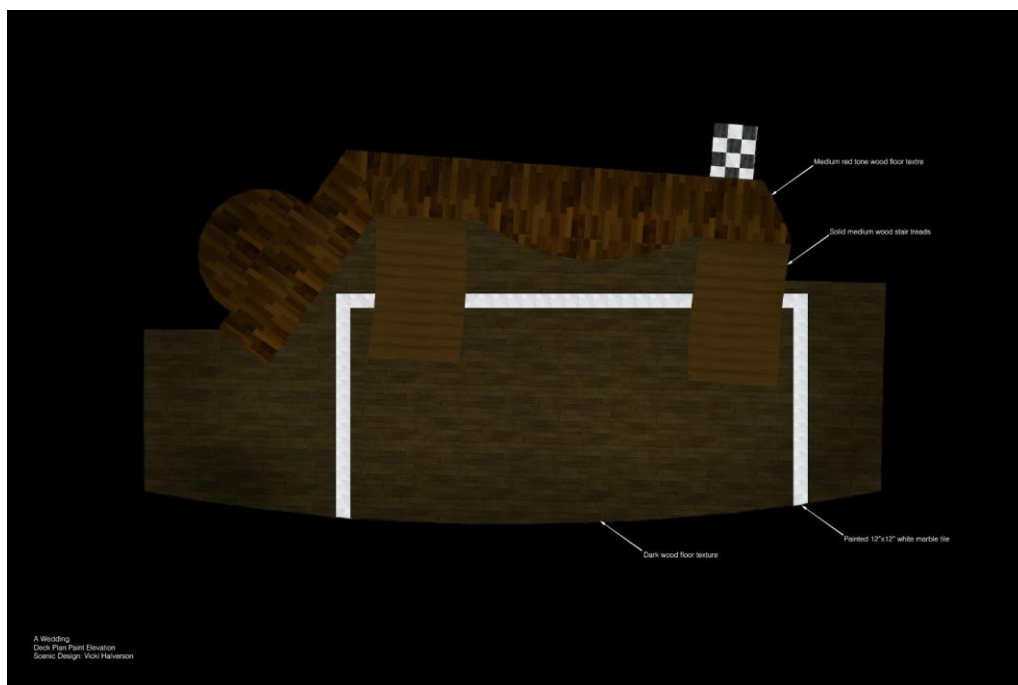


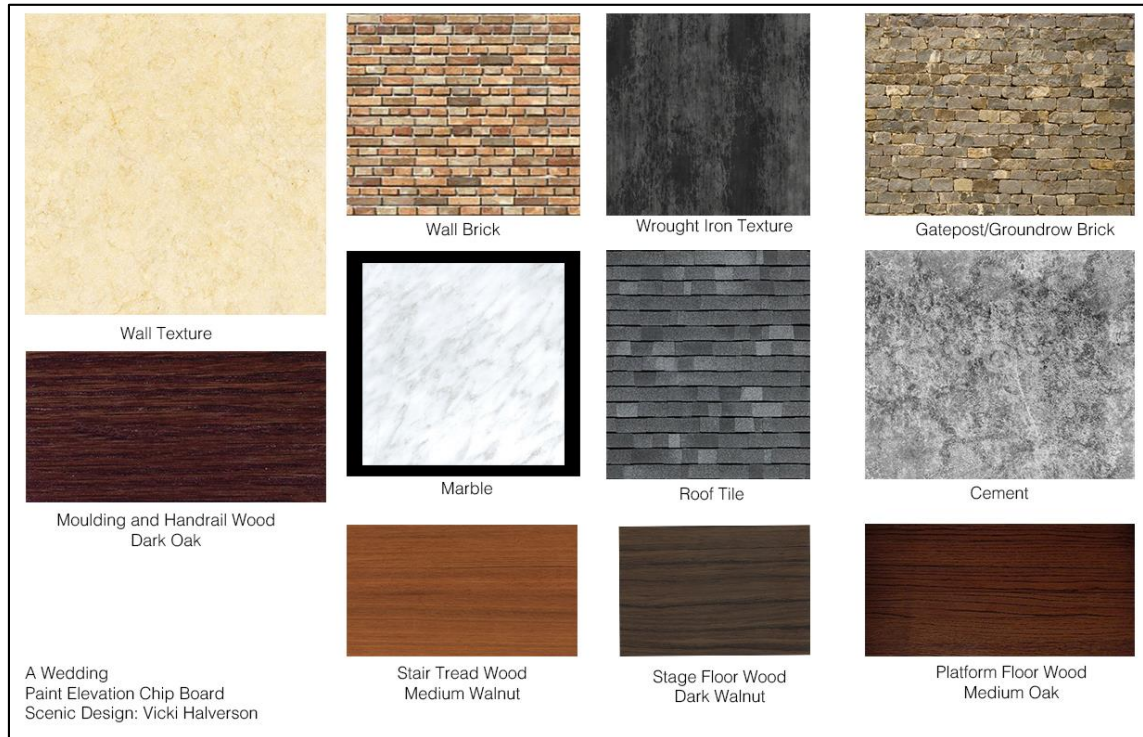
Gateposts

A Wedding
Paint Elevations
Scenic Design: Vicki Halverson



All of the painter elevations, except for the floor plan below, were printed on 11"x17" heavy paper.





The above chip board was created only in Photoshop. It contains all of the images used to create the textures seen in the above painter elevations. This allowed me to give Jill Hibbard, the paint charge, a close up image of the source to each texture in the design for color matching and sampling purposes.

CHAPTER 3: PRODUCTION PROPERTIES

3.1: PROPERTIES LIST

A new practice I began during this production process was creating the properties list and a corresponding properties research image book. To compile the original list, seen below, I read and listened to the score multiple times. I notated each prop in my physical score, then created the list in Microsoft Xcel. I separated the properties into three general groups: set decoration, hand props, and consumables. I notated the number of each item needed, at what page in the score the prop came onstage, and any additional notes I deemed necessary for the properties master. Each prop is number with an “item number” to make the props easily referable within the properties list. Creating this original document allowed properties mistress Jill Hibbard to have the base list before rehearsals begin. The document allowed her to pull as many rehearsal properties as early in the rehearsal process. Control of this list shifts to the Jill Hibbard during rehearsals, meaning that she then keeps track of added and cut props from the rehearsal reports.

The corresponding research image document, seen in Chapter 3.2, I created using Microsoft Word. The item numbers of the properties list are the page numbers of this document. In other terms, each prop populates one page of the research document. There are a few props which have more than one research image. For example, the railing decoration has a research image of the overall look I wanted, making a comparison with the fabric swags possible with another research image that shows the fabric I wanted. A different example of more than one research image per item are the framed paintings. Each has a research image of the style of painting I wanted along with a research image of the picture frame I wanted for the painting, since both items pertained to the same prop. This research document gave Jill Hibbard the exact look of all items coming onstage, so if she needed to make or buy an item the research image gave her a look to emulate. During any point of the rehearsal process Jill Hibbard could request

more specific research for an item, or research for an added item. I maintained control of this document, therefore maintaining control of the overall look of the properties.

Department: Johnny Carson School of Theatre and Film					Director: William Shomos			
Show: <i>A Wedding</i>					Set Designer: Vicki Halverson (952) 240-2744			
Space: Kimball Recital Hall					Prop Master: Jill Hibbard			
Prop #	Prop	Score Page	Description	Qty.	Reh. y/n	Tech y/n	Perf. y/n	Notes
SET DRESSING AND FURNITURE								
1	Table	6	Furniture	1				Reception gift table
2	Round Table	159	Furniture					Wedding Cake table
3	Bed	13	Furniture	1				Twin size; used for Nettie's Bedroom location
4	Portrait of Nettie		Set decoration	1				Renaissance painting style
5	Landscape Painting		Set decoration	1				
6	Wall Sconce		Set decoration	6				Needs to work, will be used as a practical light; 4 interior and 2 exterior
7	Domed Ceiling Light		Set decoration	2				Needs to work, will be used as a practical light
8	Gatepost Sconce		Set decoration	2				Needs to work, will be used as a practical light
9	Front Door Handles		Set decoration	2				
10	Door Handles		Set decoration	4				One for first floor door, 3 for second floor doors
11	Railing Draped Wedding Decorations		Wedding set decoration	3				Only on 2nd level railings
12	Tablecloth		Wedding set decoration	1				Used on gift table
13	Floral Arrangements	6	Wedding set decoration	2				One located on Gift Table, other on Bar
14	Hand Soaps		Bathroom local set decoration	2				Will be placed in the nook revealed in stage left staircase
15	Hand Towels		Bathroom local set decoration	4				Will be placed in the nook revealed in stage left staircase
16	Shower Head		Bathroom local set decoration	1				
17	Toilet		Bathroom local set decoration	1				
18	Small classic italian sculpture		Lugi's Grotto Set decoration	1				Will be placed in the nook revealed in stage right staircase
HAND PROPS								
19	Whiskey Bottle	1		1				Holds consumable liquid
20	Shot Glass	1	Matching style of item #17	1				

21	Large Pillow	11		1			For bearing the ring
22	Wedding Rings	11		2			One for Muffin and Dino. Consult with costumes.
23	Bourbon Bottle	30		1			Located on Bar
24	Bourbon Glass	30	Matching style of item #22	1			
25	Single Dollars	32		5			Will get crumpled up during performance
26	Wine Glasses	48		4			Matching
27	Wine Decanter	48		1			Contains consumable liquid
28	Camera	58		1			Used again on score pg 302
29	Serving Tray	61		2			One for drinks and one for caviar to circle Ballroom
30	Hypodermic Needle	88		1			
31	Small bottle of Morphine	88		1			
32	Single Rose	113		1			Has thorns to prick finger on
33	Motorcycle Helmet	131		1			Consult with costumes
34	Large Wrapped Painting	139		1			Unwrapped on score pg 147: reveals a painting of a nude Muffin surrounded by factories and farms
35	Dinner Gong	155		1			
36	Quilt	155		1			Large enough to cover painting (item #33)
37	Knife	159		1			
38	Wine Glass	185		1			Can be item #26 reused
39	Decanter of Wine	185		1			Can be item #27 reused, with new consumable liquid
40	Suitcase	195		1			
41	Large Package	195		1			Contains huge Mortadella that is pulled out on score pg 203
42	Passport	198		1			Italy as origin country
43	Gift Knife	200		1			Dulled so cannot harm actors during chase scene
44	Pistols	203		3			
45	Cart of Wine and Food	207		1			Only a few items pulled off are consumable
46	Liquor Bottle	238		1			Contains consumable liquid
47	Liquor Glass	238	Matches style of item #45	1			
48	Small Suitcase	245		1			

49	Wet Towel	257		1			Wet as if just used to dry off after a shower
50	Champagne Bottles	299		3			Corks popped onstage. Contains consumable liquid
51	Champagne Glasses	299		12			One for each family member
52	Single Rose	303		1			No thorns on stem
53	Liquor Bottle	310		1			Can be item #45 reused
54	Large Liquor Glass	310		1			Needs to hold a "huge" drink
55	Valise	311		1			
56	Handkerchief	312		1			Consult with costumes
57	Suitcases	323		2			
CONSUMABLES							
58	Can of Dr. Pepper			2			One used on pg 55, other on pg 258 of score.
59	Glass of Champagne	61		1			
60	Spoons of Caviar	61		1			
61	Glass of Bourbon	93		1			Delivered on serving tray (item #29)
62	Wedding Cake	159		1			Decoration echo swagged fabric home decoration as well as railing detail; bride and groom at top echo Dino and Muffin revealed at the church
63	Piece of Wedding Cake	173		1			
64	Mortadella	203		1			Pulled out of item #40
65	Whiskey						Quantity used per show to be determined at a later date
66	Bourbon						Quantity used per show to be determined at a later date
67	Champagne						Quantity used per show to be determined at a later date
68	Unspecifie Liquor						Quantity used per show to be determined at a later date
69	Food and Wine						Used on item #44

CHAPTER 3: PRODUCTION PROPERTIES

3.2: PROPERTIES REFERENCE IMAGE BOOK

A Walking Properties Research Book



1 | Prop



2 | Prop



3 | Prop



Painting Style



Frame Options:
I prefer the option on the right (with oval opening) but if that is too difficult to find/replicate than the option on the left is a preferred alternate.

4 | Prop



5 | Prop



6 | Prop



7 | Prop



8 | Prop



9 | Prop



10 | Prop



Style of hanging the fabric, but with now floral arrangements



Style and color of fabric

11 | Prop



12 | Prop



13 | Prop



14 | Prop



15 | Prop



16 | Prop



17 | Prop



18 | Prop



19 | Prop



20 | Prop



21 | Prop



22 | Prop



23 | Prop



24 | Prop



25 | Prop



26 | Prop



27 | Prop



28 | Prop



29 | Prop



30 | Prop



31 | Prop



32 | Prop



33 | Prop



Painting Style

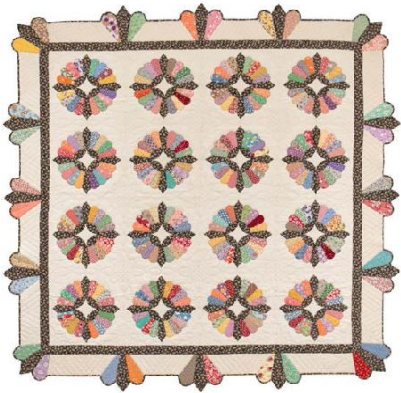


Painting Frame Style

34 | Prop



35 | Prop



36 | Prop



37 | Prop



38 | Prop



39 | Prop



40 | Prop



41 | Prop



42 | Prop



Knife handle



Knife profile



43 | Prop

44 | Prop



45 | Prop



46 | Prop



47 | Prop



48 | Prop



Embroidery in a different color

49 | Prop



50 | Prop



51 | Prop



52 | Prop



53 | Prop



54 | Prop



55 | Prop



56 | Prop



57 | Prop



58 | Prop



59 | Prop



60 | Prop



61 | Prop



62 | Prop



63 | Prop



64 | Prop



65 | Prop



66 | Prop



67 | Prop



68 | Prop



CHAPTER 4: REHEARSAL PROCESS

4.1: PRODUCTION MEETINGS

When the rehearsal process began, so too did the weekly production meetings. These meetings allowed for all designers, the director, and the stage manager to meet and clarify questions or dilemmas that arose during rehearsal. For this particular production, all rehearsals took place in a rehearsal space with no scenery. The absence of scenery meant that any questions posed to me during rehearsal could be answered only on a hypothetical basis. Neither Jason Hibbard nor I could answer scenic questions with absolute certainty until the performers began working with the scenic pieces, which would not happen until the technical rehearsals. During these meetings I presented the color model seen in Chapter 2, and the color renderings seen in Chapter 2.2.

These meetings always took place in a timely fashion, with each person getting a chance to ask questions of the others. The main purpose of such production meetings is to ask questions and get clarification from other production team members. For example, originally written in the score, Aunt Bea (a member of the Sloan family) arrives with a painting as a wedding gift at the top of the second act of the opera. The authors of the original screenplay on which composer Bolcom based his opera, namely John Considine and Patricia Resnick, described what this painting depicts. The original research I did for the properties image research book, seen in Chapter 3.2, is of the style of painting originally mentioned. Properties mistress Jill Hibbard, asked about this painting during a meeting. Quickly I realized that director Shomos and I had not discussed what our interpretation of this painting would be during our early meetings. I then asked for some research images from director Shomos so I could get a good grasp of his ideas for this painting.

Other times, we clarified which team member was responsible for certain projects: for example, the question of who was going to create the paintings mentioned above. After some discussion, it was decided that I would create the images in Photoshop, since Jill Hibbard does not know the software program, and she was then to assume responsibility for getting the images printed on canvas. With that knowledge, I used the production meeting to schedule a time to take the photographs of the actresses with undergraduate Robert Klein, the stage manager. At the next production meeting after this discussion I then showed the images I created (shown below) for approval. On the left is Nettie's portrait and on the right is the painting discussed in the previous paragraph.



These meetings were held weekly, with intermittent email communication happening throughout the week. The production meetings allowed me to focus on completing any update to drafting plates or creating specific items, like the paintings above during the rest of the week. I answered emails as I received them, but rarely did I start any conversations as I knew I gathered information at the subsequent production meeting. There were a few exceptions to this practice,

but that was only before I worked on updates did I need answers to questions or an approval on a decision I made that slightly changed the set.

In past productions I have worked on, the final production meeting occurs the same week that technical rehearsals begin. This concomitant scheduling allows any final questions to arise and find final clarifications. Any final clarifications or changes agreed to at this meeting the appropriate technical crew members can implement before the first technical rehearsal. In the case of *A Wedding*, the final production meeting was cancelled. Throughout the week I then received many emails from the technical director and paint charge about final clarification of finishes. The technical director also called me the day after the meeting was to have occurred, who told me that the wedding decorations for the railing, which had been changed at an earlier production meeting, were not working out as we had hoped they would. Jason Hibbard also stated that director Shomos did not completely support these decorations. Hibbard thus did not feel inclined to put the work into something that he believed the director might cut from the production. After this conversation I became very frustrated, because these conversations should have taken place at the cancelled meeting.

A very similar conversation about the railing decorations occurred at what turned out to be the final production meeting. Director Shomos had become worried about the timing of the scene change in which the railing decorations were involved, so he suggested the decorations be cut completely. I then explained that I did not believe a family as wealthy as the Sloans would have a sparsely decorated house for a family members wedding reception. It was at this meeting that the decorations changed. As soon as this conversation finished, I sent an email to J.D Madsen asking his advice as to how to proceed with this problem. I had already brainstormed a new, simpler solution to this problem, but did not know how to continue the conversation with

technical director Hibbard and director Shomos. J.D Madsen advised me to wait until the first technical rehearsal, when director Shomos could see what I had previously been describing, and then continue the discussion. I decided to take his advice to wait until technical rehearsals to make any more decisions.

CHAPTER 4: REHEARSAL PROCESS

4.2: TECHNICAL REHEARSALS

The first technical rehearsal was on Saturday, February 21st, 2015. This was also the first rehearsal in which the actors used the set. What I paid attention most during this rehearsal, and all subsequent rehearsals, to scenery, paint, and props. Throughout each rehearsal I took notes, marking references to props, paint, or scenery. After the first rehearsal finished I then created an Excel spreadsheet listing observations of each area in numerical importance, with numeral “1” as most important. I then emailed this document to Jason and Jill Hibbard. Below is the document I created.

Notes listed in order of importance		
Tech Rehearsal Notes		
Scenic Design: Vicki Halverson		
2/21/15		
SCENERY		
#	ITEM	NOTE
1	Center Platform	Could we add a kicker in front of the openings where the stairs are on the platform?
2	Nettie's Bed	If we could raise it, maybe adding a "mattress", that raises where the actress sits about 12"-18" so we can see her face over the railing.
3	Railing	Can the top of the SR staircase railing be tightened down any more, it seems really wobbly tonight
4	Stairs	The backs of the staircases need to be solid and painted marble to match
5	Columns	Can those be more secure so if anything accidentally hits them they don't become askew
6	Supertitle Screen	Can that be centered please.
7	Walls	Can the seams not covered by a pilaster be smoothed out
8	Doors	Can the upstage sides of the main doors and upper level doors match the front - even if it's just painted
9	Walls	Can the light leaks be fixed on the US roof piece, around the center upper level door and the SR reveal wall
10	Platform Step	Can the light leak between the SR platform and the step be fixed
11	Stairs	Are attached handles necessary? Is it possible to have cutout handles instead?
12	Groundrow	Can the premade groundrow be used to hide the floor cyc lights
13	Mirrors	Can the upper level mirrors be hung higher - so top of mirror frame is at the same height as the decorative moulding
14	Scrim Border	Is there a short border in stock that could be hung to cover the top of the scrim
15	SL Traveler Rope	Can that be hidden
PAINT		
#	ITEM	NOTE
1	Walls	Can we tone the entire walls just a bit - the faces are blending into the walls
2	Walls	Can we tone and darken the tops of the upper level walls to help draw the eye to head height
3	Door Reveals	Can all door reveals be painted to match the moulding (in color)
4	Stairs	Can we blend the brakes into the walls - or at least dull down the shineyness of them and paint the red handle to match
5	Stairs	If the handles cannot be removed from the walls, can they be painted to match the walls of the staircase
PROPS		
#	ITEM	NOTE
1	Railing Fabric	Can we attach the pick points for the swoops directly to the railing and tie the excess so it sits nicely on the top of the railing. Then, for the scene change all that would need to happen is for the maids to untie and push the fabric so it falls over the railing. I can come in and help with this as well.
2	Luigi's Bar	Can the wheels be hidden on the bar? They are very noticeable.
3	Luigi's Table	Can the table be made to look intentionally rustic. Right now the style of the table clashes some with the style of the bar and looks like it's not the real table. If the table was tweaked to look intentionally bulky and rustic then it would work better as an overall choice.

During the technical rehearsal, J.D Madsen and I brainstormed ideas to simplify the railing decoration discussed in Chapter 4.1. The final result of this discussion with Madsen is note number one under props in the above document. I talked through my idea with both director Shomos and Jason Hibbard. Director Shomos approved of the simplified solution to the original railing decoration and Jason Hibbard concurred. Hibbard then told me that because I understood how to make this idea work, and because I knew best what I wanted the final result to look like, it would be easiest if I completed the note. This was a surprising suggestion, since the original wedding decorations, of which this is a simplified version, were to be created by properties mistress Jill Hibbard. When I emailed Jill Hibbard the notes I explained this idea in the body of the email as well. I then got the same response from her as I did Jason Hibbard. I took their answers to mean that if I did not complete this note, it was not going to be completed.

Since I have classes and graduate assistantship responsibilities during the work week, I decided to come into the theatre seven hours before the second technical rehearsal began to complete this note. I also wanted to make sure that the actors untying the swags of fabric had as much time to rehearse with them as possible. I arrived at the theatre mid-morning the next day and started working, finishing two hours later. As I waited for the technical rehearsal to begin later that evening, Jason Hibbard approached me to discuss the notes I sent the previous night. I then was told a list a reasons why notes could not be completed. The main reason, he said, was that he did not have the skilled labor to accomplish all these notes.

This revelation surprised me immensely. Never during the production meetings had it been mentioned that Jason Hibbard needed assistance in building the scenery. All he had ever said was that the build was moving along at a good pace. Another revelation during this discussion is that the Glenn Korff School of Music pays the Johnny Carson School of Theatre and

Film \$1,000 as a design fee for the time I put in outside of my normal graduate student hours to work on this production. That information itself was not surprising; what was surprising was being told that Jason Hibbard believed this fee meant he then could then have me as a worker during my graduate assistant shop hours. Again, this information was new to me, whether it came from Jason Hibbard or from a faculty member of the Johnny Carson School of Theatre and Film. I had never received any such information at any meeting nor through email. During my graduate assistant shop hours, for spring semester 2015, I was the paint shop manager for the theatre department. During tech week of *A Wedding* there is no other graduate student able to cover for me while I am over working on the opera. I mentioned this to Jason Hibbard, along with the fact that I would have to talk to my supervisor and that this request would be hard to approve on such short notice. The rest of the technical rehearsals happened without any major glitches. What happened before and after the technical rehearsals made this particular tech week difficult.

The following afternoon, my status as a production team member shifted. Half way through my graduate assistant shop hours, Laurel Shoemaker – the lighting design advisor and through whom this design opportunity was presented to me – came and told me that Jason Hibbard was strongly requesting that I work on the opera. I was to stop what I was doing and go over to Kimball Recital Hall (where *A Wedding* was staged) to work on the opera. Jason Hibbard's wording, of which Laurel Shoemaker paraphrased to "called her on it," really upset me, making me believe that I was the first student designer in this situation. I had no say in this decision, and I was forced to leave the paint charge for the current Johnny Carson School of Theatre and Film theatrical production a worker short (when it was mainly the two of us as the work force). I was already stressed due to the short time (four days) before opening, and the stress led me to have a slight emotional breakdown. I then talked this through with Michaela

Stein, a fellow scenic graduate student and the former house paint charge, and Laurel Shoemaker. I made my feelings known about the phrasing “called her on it” and my displeasure with being pulled off of my work in the Johnny Carson School of Theatre and Film with very little notice. I then took a deep, calming breath and went to work on the opera.

Having been yanked, for lack of a better word, from the position of scenic designer to position of worker affected how the rest of the technical rehearsal went. I was under the impression, from my earlier conversation with Laurel Shoemaker that I would be able to focus on the detail painting of pieces. That circumstance left properties mistress Jill Hibbard alone to paint the large scenic pieces that, up to this date, had not been painted. So what happened? Jason Hibbard assigned me all the remaining painting jobs. The first day I worked on the opera I did detail work on the wall mouldings I had designed, which Jill Hibbard assigned me to do.

On Tuesday, February 24th, 2015 I again went to work on the opera during my graduate assistantship shop hours. Jason Hibbard assigned me to paint the bar, which was to be used in a publicity photo two hours and thirty minutes after I arrived. I accomplished this task with fifteen minutes of drying time before the photographer arrived. By the time I had finished painting, both Jason Hibbard and Jill Hibbard left due to a previously scheduled meeting. Since painting the bar was the only task I was assigned, I finished work for the day. Following the technical rehearsal Jason Hibbard inquired if I was again “his” the next day. When I responded with yes, he assigned me to paint the gateposts the next day – after being told that the detail work I started the previous day had to be put on the back-burner so everything could actually get painted. He also told me that I needed to paint faster. I was not prepared to hear a comment that seemingly belittled my painting abilities delivered in such a disrespectful way (said as a statement instead of phrased as a

question.) It was at this moment I realized that I was viewed as “his” (Jason Hibbard’s) worker even when I was the scenic designer of the entire *A Wedding* production.

This statement “you need to paint faster” and the way he delivered it, coupled with the stressing realization that my final vision of this scenic design may not happen, led me to have another emotional breakdown. The next day, Wednesday February 25th I had a conversation with J.D Madsen, who was not around for my first conversation with Laurel Shoemaker. I relayed what was happening during technical rehearsal, the statement from the previous night, Jason Hibbard’s statements about not having enough skilled workers as the reason the set was the state it was in, and that I was afraid that there was a very good chance that the opera would open with an incomplete scenic design.

He advised me to not take the comment to heart. I was not at the University of Nebraska Lincoln to be a scenic painter, nor was I being trained as such. If the scenery remained unfinished by opening, no one could accuse me of not painting as fast as Jill Hibbard. Madsen also advised me not to question what Jason Hibbard was having me do, just do the job(s) assigned to me when I was over at the opera as a worker. Again, I took a deep, calming breath and went over to the opera to work.

With this new information, and before the graduate assistant shop hours started, I received a text message letting me know that the other two scenic graduates – Michaela Stein and David Tousley – would spend their graduate assistant shop hours for Wednesday February 25th and Thursday, February 26th working on the opera. This show of support, along with me having to shift my focus to the class I attend before the shop hours began, allowed me to get my emotions under control and go over Kimball Recital Hall calm and ready to work. Work on the opera this day entailed me painting the gateposts. What I failed to argue with Jason Hibbard

when he assigned me the task, and what J.D Madsen pointed out would have been a valid action on my part, was that since Jill Hibbard had already painted one side of one gatepost, I would then have to match her hand on the rest. This would then take me longer to paint because I did not know her process. I ended up staying one hour and thirty minutes past David Tousley and Michaela Stein, who left after our graduate shop hours had finished for the day, to complete the gateposts and the accompanying detail pieces.

Thursday, Feb. 26th, 2015 was the final day I went to work on the opera. Archival photographs, which are what people will see when looking up this production, were taken during that night's final dress rehearsal. David Tousely, Michaela Stein and I worked to have a completely painted set – no visible raw wood to the audience – with as much detail as possible. As we were not being assigned jobs by Jason or Jill Hibbard, we worked on what we knew needed to get done for photographs that night. Toward the end of the afternoon, Jason Hibbard asked Michaela Stein to stop painting the unfinished mural used in Luigi's Grotto. We then decided to stop working and clean up. At that point, we were doing more than was originally asked of us, and were furthermore not being utilized to our full potential. I left it knowing that I had done everything in my capacity to achieve the original intentions I had as a Scenic Designer, going above the call of my duty to ensure as completed a product as possible.

CHAPTER 4: REHEARSAL PROCESS

4.3: PROCESS PHOTOGRAPHS OF TECHNICAL REHEARSALS

Saturday Feb. 21st, 2015





Sunday, Feb. 22nd, 2015





Monday, Feb. 23rd, 2015





Wednesday, Feb. 25th, 2015

The evening of Tuesday February 24th I was assigned to paint these gateposts by the technical director before leaving the rehearsal. Jill, acting as the paint charge, had painted one side of a gatepost, meaning that I had to then match what was painted. The top photograph shows the original on the right and the base of what I began painting on the left. The bottom photograph shows a finished gatepost side I painted on the left with the original still shown on the right.



CHAPTER 5: PERFORMANCE

5.1: PRODUCTION PHOTOGRAPHS

Archival Photographs taken during Final Dress: Thursday Feb. 26th, 2015











CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION

To conclude, during the process of being the scenic designer for *A Wedding*, there was much I learned. The most valuable thing I learned was about the value of a dedicated crew. As a scenic designer, I will never achieve success without a dedicated group of fellow artisans and crafts people who are dedicated to the success of the production as much as I am. It was unfortunate that *A Wedding* suffered from a lack of commitment to a finalized product from those who are responsible for ensuring its completion.

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